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For Immediate Release

Contact: Shannon Murphy
(310) 849-4687

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**FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA LAUNCHES NEW CAMPAIGN TO TALK,
READ AND SING SO KIDS AGES 0-5 HAVE A CHANCE TO
SUCCEED**

SACRAMENTO, CA—In the wake of compelling research on the importance of early brain development for children ages 0-5, First 5 California has announced it is launching a new statewide media campaign encouraging parents and caregivers to talk, read, and sing to babies and toddlers.

“The most recent science tells us that exercising the brains of babies in the first years of life has an extremely powerful impact on their development. We know that the more early engagement and stimulation a child receives, the stronger their cognitive skills, emotional well-being, and physical and mental health will be,” said George Halvorson, Chair of the First 5 California Children and Families Commission. “With the highest population of young children in the nation, it is vital for California to help all of our babies and toddlers get the right level of brain growth support—and that is why First 5 is now promoting the simple but powerful steps of talking, reading and singing to create the mental exercise that gives babies and toddlers the strong foundation they need for success.”

“By the time a child enters kindergarten, his or her brain is already very largely developed,” said First 5 Commissioner Conway Collis. “Studies show that the vast majority of children who are behind in kindergarten will never catch up. Research also shows children who lag behind their peers tend to have a higher rate of teenage pregnancy and incarceration. By working with parents and caregivers we can address these problems before they develop.”

There are also social and emotional benefits to children who have caregivers who talk, read, and sing to them. Without those linguistic skills and attachments to caring adults, research shows children are less ready to participate in and benefit from school. Additionally, brain scans of children who have had caregivers talk, read, and sing to them regularly appear dramatically healthier in several respects than those of children who have not had that exposure.

Several elected officials including Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, Senator Carol Liu, Assemblymember Dr. Richard Pan, Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva and Assemblymember Shirley Weber joined Halvorson, Collis and First 5's Executive Director Camille Maben at the news conference to launch the campaign.

"We can't continue denying the science. By age three, kids born into low-income families have heard roughly 30-million fewer words than their more affluent peers, leaving many Californian children pre-destined for success or failure before they enter kindergarten" Senator Steinberg said. "First 5 California's media campaign delivers this important message into homes statewide. It is imperative that California mirrors their media outreach by providing early learning opportunities, which is exactly what we're proposing this year through the *Pre-K* and *Strong Start* bills that are currently in the Senate."

"If we invest in children early we can close the achievement gap before it starts. This study reinforces what we already know and gives us actionable steps to do so. I commend First 5 California for their service to our state and join them in encouraging all Californians to talk, sing, and read to the little ones in their lives." said Sen. Carol Liu, D-La Canada Flintridge and Chair of the Senate Education Committee.

"From my time as the Director of the UC Davis Pediatric Residency Program, as a First 5 Commissioner for Sacramento County, to now being a parent myself, I have both studied and seen firsthand how interacting with children helps them to grow and develop with positive results," said Assemblymember Dr. Richard Pan (D-Sacramento). "I am proud to be standing by First 5 California, the important research they are conducting, and their efforts to share this information with all Californians so that we can work together to develop the minds of our youth."

At a news conference in the State Capitol, First 5 California unveiled a fully integrated campaign including television commercials, radio ads, digital ads and a powerful parent's website. The two 30-second television commercials and website updates will begin airing tomorrow, Thursday, March 13. The commercials are geared toward parents, encouraging them to talk, read and sing to their children in order to stimulate brain development in the first years of their child's life. Ads were created and produced by Fraser Communications.

In one of First 5 California's new commercials, the announcer states, "The moment babies are born, their brains are forming the connections that determine how they learn, think, and grow. Talk and read to your children from day one. Their brains are developing with your every word. It's free and easy and something you can do any time. Talk. Read. Sing."

Another First 5 California commercial highlights the effects of brain development on a child's future, "Babies who are talked to from the time they're born are more

likely to have a successful future. Talking and reading to children in their first years has a high impact on what they do with the rest of their lives. The fewer words they hear the greater their chances of dropping out of school and getting into trouble.”

“As a former teacher, I have seen firsthand in the classroom how important parents’ participation in their child’s education can be to the success of the child,” said Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva (D-Fullerton). “However, we need to start earlier than that. We must educate parents about these benefits in order to enable a brighter future for our children.”

The First 5 California parent website has also been updated to share vital information and links regarding early childhood brain development. The website also helps dispel common myths about parenting (such as parents needing to buy expensive educational toys and DVDs to help their children learn).

The parent website can be found at www.first5california.com/parents.

“Talking, reading and singing are easy and free,” said First 5 California Executive Director Camille Maben. “But by increasing their vocabularies and setting up greater chances that they stay in school, parents can actually give their children a million dollar gift in terms of greater lifetime earnings.”

“I would like to commend First 5 for helping empower parents to help stimulate their children’s minds through simple everyday activities,” said Assemblymember Shirley Weber, “Talking, reading and singing to babies and toddlers is something parents can do at any time.”

Links to Key Brain Development Research

- **Harvard Study** “*The Science of Early Childhood Development*” (2007): http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/science_of_early_childhood_development/
- **Child Welfare Information Gateway** “*Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Brain Development*” (2009): https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/brain_development/
- **Medical Daily** “*Chilling Brain Scans Show the Impact of a Mother’s Love on a Child’s Brain Size*”: <http://www.medicaldaily.com/chilling-brain-scans-show-impact-mothers-love-childs-brain-size-243328>

About First 5 California

First 5 California, also known as the California Children and Families Commission, was established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November

1998, which added a tax on tobacco products to fund education, health, childcare and other services for children ages 0-5 and their families. Its programs and resources are designed to educate teachers, parents, grandparents, and caregivers about the critical role they play during a child's first five years –with the overarching goal of helping more California kids grow up healthy and ready to succeed in school and in life. For more information please visit www.first5california.com/parents.

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